DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 214 347 EC 141 566

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TITLE An Analysis of Gifted Preschool Children: Positive and Negative Social Behaviors.
PUB DATE [80]
NOTE 14p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Behavior Patterns; *Gifted; *Interpersonal Competence; Preschool Education; *Social Development

ABSTRACT

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An Analysis of Gifted Preschool Children Positive and Negative Social Behaviors

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Running Head: An Analysis of Gifted Preschool Children: Positive and Negative Social Behaviors

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Abstract

Positive and negative behaviors of nineteen gifted preschool children were studied, and relationships between positive (verbal and physical) behaviors and negative (verbal and physical) behaviors were examined. Children conveyed proportionally more positive behaviors, with negative behaviors occurring at a minimal rate. A chi-square analysis indicated that the children engaged in positive, rather than negative, and suggested that the socialization process for gifted preschool children included descriptive categories of positive behaviors.

An Analysis of Gifted Preschool Children: Positive and Negative Social Behaviors

Most research available on gifted individuals have usually been case studies of children who were identified in their primary or secondary level of school as being superior in their academics (Abroms & Collins, 1977; Naumann, 1974; Terman, 1954; Terman & Oden, 1947). The most significant subject areas of academic precocity have been in the languages, mathematical abilities and artistic endeavors (Gallagher, 1975; George, Cohn & Stanley, 1979; Stanley, George & Solano, 1977; Robinson, Jackson & Roedell, 1978; Roedell, Jackson & Robinson, 1980; Terman, 1954). Minimal research has been directed toward analyzing positive and negative behaviors in gifted preschool children.

Moreover, the hypothesis for this research, that gifted preschool children engage more frequently in positive (verbal and physical) behaviors versus negative (verbal and physical) behaviors, has not been previously studied, placing limitations on the ecological literature on gifted children (Naumann, 1974). A related study of gifted preschool children and the assessment of social behaviors was conducted by Abroms and Gollin (1980). The study focused on psychosocial giftedness and the measurement of prosocial behaviors. The authors concluded that an increase in positive social behaviors from the Fall to the Spring was independent of cognitive development.

Social development among gifted children as examined by Terman & Oden (1947) suggested that intelligence, as measured by the I.Q. test, was related to some measures of social skills. More specifically, this proposition was also supported by research with gifted preschool children conducted by Robinson, et al. (1978). While this research would suggest that intelligence influences the socialization process of gifted children, what remains to be delineated is the degree to which particular behaviors relate to gifted preschool children. The primary objective of this study was to examine the time these children spent in positive behaviors versus negative behaviors during free play time.

Method

Subjects. The sample consisted of nineteen (19) gifted preschool children, 10 boys and 9 girls, enrolled in the Child Development Research Program at the University of Washington. The boys ranged in age from 4 years-2 months to 5 years-3 months, mean age = 57.5. The girls ranged in age from 4 years-2 months to 5 years-3 months, mean age = 56.4. The mean I.Q. for the group, as measured by the Stanford-Binet test, was 141.85.

Observational Coding of Behavior. The social behaviors inventory was based on a revised version of the California Preschool Social Competency Scale (Levine, Elzey & Lewis, 1969), resulting in the identification of twelve positive and ten negative behavioral categories. In the revised inventory, four general categories of behaviors were used; verbal positive and physical positive behaviors, and verbal negative and physical negative behaviors. Verbal positive behavior consisted of six specific expressions; greeting, conversation, compliment, concern, laughing, and singing. Verbal negative behaviors were distinguished in terms of specific noxious responses;

name calling, reprimand, exclusion, abrasive language, and whining Physical positive behaviors included responses scored as pleasant; hug, pat, holding hands, sharing materials, smiling and running with a peer. The negative physical behaviors included certain attack behaviors such as; threat by jesture, push, grab, hit, and rock throwing.

Procedure. Observations of the children were made according to a random schedule over a period of 8 weeks at the Child Development Research Group. Frequency sampling sheets were attached to a clipboard which the observer used. The randomly chosen child to be observed was spotted, and the child's name, sex, age, date and time were recorded for identification. Each child was observed for 20 consecutive minutes and scored on all incidents of behavior. A total of 259 incidents were recorded. The observer reliability was subjectively judged to be very high (better than .95) by several researchers who were knowledgeable about the observer's previous recordings.

Results

A chi-square test was performed between positive behavior occurrence indicating statistical significance as the children engaged more in positive behaviors as opposed to negative behaviors, X^2 (1) = 5.52, $p < .05$.

Table I presents a summary of initiated verbal social behaviors in gifted preschool children, and indicates the total observed frequency, per

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Insert Table I about here

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unit-of-total behaviors within the category, percent of total behaviors, and percent of total children.

Nearly 53% of the verbal positive behaviors involved conversation. Three categories; greeting, conversation and laughing accounted for 89% of verbal positive behaviors. Fewer than 12% of all observations involved compliment, concern and singing. Conversation represented 27% of total behaviors and 95% of all children engaged in this behavior during observations.

The verbal negative behaviors are also summarized in Table I. There was a low frequency of name calling, reprimand, exclusion, abrasive language and whining; these categories added up to 15 incidents. Reprimand was the highest with 5 episodes, while abrasive language had only 1 episode, and the three other categories had an average of 3 episodes each. The verbal negative behaviors represented only 6% of all total behaviors of all children.

Table II also indicates the total observed frequency, per unit-of-total behaviors within the category, percent of total behaviors and percent of total children. An analysis of initiated physical social behaviors in gifted preschool children revealed that 85% of these behaviors were accounted for by sharing materials and smiling categories. Three categories, hug, pat, and hold-hands had 6% of all behaviors, while running

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Insert Table II about here

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with peers had 9% of total behavior within the category and 31% of the total number of children involved in this activity.

The negative physical behaviors, also summarized in Table II, show a total of 23 incidents of; threat by jesture, push, grab, hit and throwing rocks, and these episodes represented 9% of the total behaviors. The inter-

actions among the negative physical behaviors were evenly distributed. However, there was only 1 incident involving hitting.

Discussion

This study was concerned with the social behaviors of gifted preschool children and how frequently they engaged in positive behaviors as opposed to negative behaviors. The results indicate that gifted children spend most of their time engaging in positive behaviors during free outdoor play-time, thus supporting the initial hypothesis. The following categories had the highest percentage of frequency occurence. The verbal positive behavior category involving conversation (see Table I) was the most frequent social behavior along with the physical positive behavior category involving smiling and sharing materials (see Table II).

The frequency of conversation may be understood in light of Roedell's comments in her book, Gifted Young Children (Roedell, et al., 1980) which exemplifies the difficulty of some gifted have in finding same-age-peers to play with whom may not be at their same linguistic level. For example, the "3-year-old who can communicate needs and ideas using complex sentences and the vocabulary of a six year old" (p. 20). At the Child Development Research Group the children have not appeared to have experienced this problem.

Another possible reason for the children engaging more frequently in positive social behaviors could be attributed to the philosophy of the Group. Development and nurturance of social skills were encouraged by the program (Robinson, et al., 1978) and this philosophy may be related to differences in behavior frequency. A different program philosophy might show different outcomes.

Further studies investigating each child's behavior over time for behavior consistency, use of teacher evaluations of the children, and using a variety of social skill measures would be beneficial research. Further, a study of social attributes of gifted children may aid in the understanding of their social behavior.

Table I

Summary of Initiated Verbal Social Behaviors

in Gifted Preschool Children

Behaviors	Observed Frequency	% of Total Within Category	% of All Behaviors	% of All Children
Verbal positive:				
Greeting	22	17	8	68
Conversation	69	53	27	95
Compliment	4	3	2	16
Concern	8	6	3	26
Laughing	24	19	9	63
Singing	2	2	1	10
Sub Total	129	(100%)	50	-
Verbal negative:				
Name calling	4	27	2	15
Reprimand	5	33	2	10
Exclusion	2	13	1	5
Abrasive language	1	7	0	5
Whining	3	20	1	5
Sub Total	15	(100%)	6	-
Total Verbal	144	-	56	-

Table II

Summary of Initiated Physical Social Behaviors

in Gifted Preschool Children

Behaviors	Observed Frequency	% of Total Within Category	% of All Behaviors	% of All Children
Physical positive:				
Hug	3	3	1	15
Pat	1	1	0	5
Hold hands	2	2	1	10
Share materials	23	25	9	80
Smiling	55	60	21	80
Running with peer	8	9	3	31
Sub Total	92	(100%)	35	-
Physical negative:				
Threat by jesture	4	17	2	5
Push	8	35	3	15
Grab	5	22	2	5
Hit	1	4	0	10
Throwing rocks	5	22	2	10
Sub Total	23	(100%)	9	-
Total Physical	115	-	44	-

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Footnote

The authors would like to thank the Child Development Research Group for general support; special thanks to Joy Menke. The authors would like to acknowledge the memory of Dr. Halbert Robinson who made this research with gifted children possible.

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